

BOOKS

Book reviews and books of interest to "Tobacco Control" should be sent to the editor at the address given on the inside front cover.

A window into the smoker's world

X20: a novel of (not) smoking. Richard Beard. New York: Avon Books, 1996, ISBN 0-380-73194-0.

As a recent arrival to the United States from Australia, a visit to one of its famous bookstores seemed in order. I had only stepped through the door when I spied Beard's novel, which, although published in 1996, hadn't come across my desk before. I was glad I bought it. For all you non-smokers out there (including me), this book gives a very convincing impression of what we might imagine the superlative pleasures of smoking to be, and the agony of giving up this nagging addiction for good.

The book has 20 chapters, one for each cigarette in a pack, and Beard portrays a series of vignettes—sometimes amusing, sometimes painful, and occasionally bizarre—by which the main character Gregory Simpson makes the journey from being a committed compulsive smoker (the word "precontemplator" doesn't begin to describe how he thinks about his smoking) to expelling cigarettes from his life.

This novel gives substance to the word "addiction"—Beard's description of the incessant aching longing for a cigarette, the utter deprivation and desolation of doing without one's lifeblood, is a fascinating window into the smoker's world. Gregory's perverse logic—perhaps a hallmark of all smokers trying to rationalise their deadly habit—is a feature of the story and in parts, becomes ridiculously funny. For example, by way of justifying his addiction, in one of his countless obsessive monologues about how

endemic tobacco has become in society at large, he constructs a whimsical list of interesting "facts"—"Economics: Karl Marx spent more money on cigars whilst writing *Das Kapital* than he earned from its publication. This might explain his strange blindness to the obvious truth that in fact tobacco is the opium of the people. Criminology: the great Sherlock Holmes insisted that all detectives of the superior sort should be able to identify 140 different varieties of tobacco. In ash form" (page 200).

As a smoker struggling to quit, Gregory comes to the realisation that his addiction is as much a political issue as a personal one. But this novel is not for those who like a logical plot—Beard's flights of fancy make this read a changeable and challenging one, much like the nature of the substance itself. At the end of the novel, I was left with a strange sense of dissatisfaction, as though the story was left unfinished—and of course for many smokers, this is exactly the situation they experience—have they given up for good?

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Forbidden pleasures

Signs of pleasure, danger and warning. Merja Salo. Helsinki, Finland: University of Art and Design, ISBN 951-558-008-0 (CD-ROM).

This is a CD-ROM, not a book, and has grown out of a doctoral dissertation in photography. It is a detailed discussion of cigarette advertising in Finland, giving an analysis of a large universe of 2764 Finnish print advertisements from 1870 to 1994, and 379 anti-smoking advertisements of more recent dates, drawn from various Finnish archives, museums, and trade sources. The innovative CD-ROM mode was chosen "to give readers the opportunity to detach themselves from a linear manner of reading" and the ability to readily browse among the 550 colour illustrations.

With a primary focus on the import of the images used, the result is an outline of the "symbolic spheres" used in advertising for and against cigarette use. Grounded in the European intellectual traditions, it relies primarily on the sometimes obscure paradigm of semiotics—exponents are, for example, Jean Baudrillard, Charles Peirce, AJ Greimas, Raymond Williams, and Roland Barthes. The result is a richly illustrated discussion that is far more qualitative than quantitative, although there are some frequency tables.

The total time span is broken down into three phases: 1870–1942, with 1032 images from this "era of innocent pleasure"; 1949–1978, with 1103 images from this "era of dangerous pleasure"; and 1978–1994, an "era of forbidden pleasure", with a more scant 165 images. In each phase, the images are analysed in terms of five dimensions: production (manufacture); product image; consumers; situations; and referential images. Like other studies, this maps the evolution of cigarette advertising images away from the product toward images of consumers and brand iconography—with odd and interest-

ing specifics, such as the disappearance of smoke and ashes from advertising imagery.

As Finland has been relatively persistent in its regulatory and legal efforts to curtail cigarette promotion since its 1978 Tobacco Act, this study is particularly helpful for its display of the many ways and means used by the industry to circumvent the intent of such legislation, such as indirect advertising through sponsorships, and the persistent use of brand logos, symbols, and fictive characters, such as the Marlboro cowboy, in advertising not merchandising cigarettes directly, but associated events—for example, races, clothing stores, travel agencies, and night clubs. This resource is also valuable for its comparisons of cigarette advertising with that attempting to promote non-smoking. The methods of this latter counter-propaganda include exaggeration, metaphoric variation, caricature, and salvation stories.

The CD-ROM is quite easy to navigate, with major sections, each with pulldown menus, appearing on the main screens. These sections are theory/method, history, advertising, health education, comparison, results, and tables of contents, references and illustrations. Within any historical time period, additional menu bars allow ready access to the analysis of image categories—consumers, situations, etc. In addition, the text and tables of contents are rich with various hypertext links. This allows the reader/viewer to instantly look at any of the 550 cited illustration, or see complete citations for referenced authors. Hypertext links also provide cross references and easy access to other sections of text.

Technically this is superbly well done. The text and instructions in English are well translated and easy to understand. The CD-ROM includes a five-minute animated introduction narrated in English. Despite a disclaimer that it was developed on Macintosh systems, and would be "coarser" when viewed in Windows 95, I had no such experience and had no difficulty loading and running the CD-ROM. I was less than entranced with the sound track and effects, repetitive when dwelling in any section, making me thankful for the volume control. Response times were excellent, and the entire package, including package inserts, is handsomely produced.

All in all, interesting for its substantive content and innovative mode of presentation.

